Claimed and Unclaimed Experience: Problematic Readings of Trauma in the Hebrew Bible

Introduction: Trauma in the study of the Hebrew Bible

The cultural sociologist Jeffrey Alexander points out, quite correctly, that the study of trauma within literary criticism has much in common with its study in psychoanalysis,[1] especially insofar as both fields see trauma as something victims have failed to fully experience and so as something they do not truly know, and that manifests itself in psychologically intrusive repetition. In works of literary critics who discuss trauma, references to Freud's works, such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and "The Uncanny," are commonly discussed, as are his conclusions concerning trauma victims' failure of experience and knowledge. Trauma is studied in many fields besides these, including philosophy, history, law, and, in the twenty-first century, biblical studies, but the meaning of trauma can vary from field to field.[2] In sociology, for example, Alexander's field, trauma is not what is unexperienced and unknown—"unclaimed experience," to use Cathy Caruth's expression—but something created and negotiated by the group. Sociologists tend to focus on the active work of groups as they provide meaning for trauma, while literary critical and psychoanalytical approaches emphasize the ways in which individuals passively endure trauma as it continually intrudes into their psychological lives, even as they fail to understand it. For sociologists, trauma is generally understood to be claimed experience, the creation of meaning rather than an absence of it, and they can be quite clear that a

[1] J.C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (London: Polity, 2012), pp. 7-12.

[2] For a brief survey of the impact and development of trauma studies in different disciplines in the twentieth century, see R. Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1-15.

social creation of trauma is not to be equated with the suffering of individuals within the group.[3]

The field of biblical studies—or at least the study of the Hebrew Bible, where we will concentrate our analysis—has, in its early stages of using trauma theory, been strongly influenced by the sociological approach. This is sometimes evident when scholars explicitly rely on the work of sociologists like Alexander or Kai Erikson, but it is more frequently manifested in arguments that the meanings produced by biblical texts gave members of an ancient Judean or Israelite society ways to make sense of the events that led to their suffering. Studies that fall into the latter category may not specifically refer to sociological theory, but they are clearly drawing on the sociological notion of trauma as claimed experience, as investing the past with meaning, although, unlike sociological analysis, these studies will often make the additional argument that these texts played a role in the victims' process of recovery, a claim sometimes found also in studies of biblical literature that explicitly follow a sociological approach. This focus on trauma as claimed experience is so influential within biblical studies that the field has often failed to deal adequately with the understanding of trauma in psychoanalytical and literary criticism, which focuses on trauma as unclaimed experience, what is not known by victims and what has no meaning for them. This article explains why our failure as biblical scholars to fully consider the psychoanalytical/literary critical approach to trauma will lead to a misunderstanding of the

[3] See, for example, the comments in J.C. Alexander and E.B. Breese, "Introduction: On Social Suffering and its Cultural Construction," in R. Eyerman, J.C. Alexander, and E.B. Breese (eds.), *Narrating Trauma: On the Impact of Collective Suffering* (Yale Cultural Sociology Series; Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), pp. xi-xxxv (xiv-xxii), which refer to the ways in which the essays in that collection have distinguished between social narratives about trauma and the collective suffering of group members.

therapeutic role the ancient texts we study could play, a noticeable failure on our part, since determining the kinds of therapeutic roles such texts had in the context of trauma is normally the point of our analysis.

It might seem obvious that what is beneficial for a society will be beneficial for individuals within it, and that a narrative that provides an intellectual framework that explains trauma to a group and results in social cohesion should also be able to give such meaning to individual victims, playing a role in a therapeutic process for trauma sufferers. But, as we shall see, while the construction of meaning by the community can promote social goods such as group cohesion, such explanation will not prove therapeutic for individual victims of trauma; such therapy is accomplished through the emergence of the victim's voice in testimony to trauma that is received by an empathetic listener, not through the social imposition of an explanatory narrative. Social speech that provides meaning and explanation for a traumatic event will not be successful in creating group cohesion if many traumatized victims within the community speak about the trauma as something without meaning; social narratives about trauma will only work, then, if they silence such voices and make victims repress their trauma, and so these narratives are actually anti-therapeutic for trauma sufferers. The general failure on our part to take account of this when we read biblical texts has, at times, led us to conclude that biblical narratives that claim the experience of trauma for readers would have been therapeutic for individual victims when this was not the case. Even some therapists have, in the past, imposed narratives over the testimonies of their traumatized patients, silencing their voices and frustrating their therapy,[4] and

[4] For a discussion of therapists of American Vietnam War veterans imposing narratives over their patients' trauma in order to have them understand themselves as successful warriors, see K. Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge Studies in American

so our failure as biblical scholars to fully acknowledge the psychoanalytical/literary understanding of trauma as unclaimed experience becomes even more acute when the possibility exists that our misunderstandings of the therapeutic value of these texts might be adopted by practitioners of pastoral care. So, for example, the introductory essay to *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, a recent collection of studies of trauma in biblical literature, claims that the use of trauma theory in biblical studies can "inform pastoral praxis with those affected by trauma,"[5] and two of the essays within this collection were written by specialists in pastoral care—those by Philip Browning Helsel and Peter Yuichi Clark—pointing to an interest from that field in current discussions of trauma in biblical studies. Kathleen O'Connor, to take another example, describes Jeremiah as "a book of pastoral care,"[6] even though she argues that an important point of the book is to "re-symbolize reality" in the face of the destructive chaos of trauma, to create meaning by explaining or making sense of the trauma, in other words.[7]

Certainly not every analysis that uses some sort of trauma theory to read texts in the Hebrew Bible adopts a sociological approach or a conception of trauma as claimed experience,

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Literature and Culture; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 147-53.

[5] C.G. Frechette and E. Boase, "Defining 'Trauma' as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation," in C.G. Frechette and E. Boase (eds.), *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (SBLSemS, 86; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), pp. 1-23 (13).

[6] K.M. O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies," in Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else Kragelund Holt (eds.), *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond* (SANt, 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), pp. 210-22 (211-13, 220).

[7] O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute," p. 213.

but to give some representative sense of the dominance of these sorts of readings in the field, we can examine the essays in three recent collections that are largely or at least partially devoted to the study of trauma in the Hebrew Bible. *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (2016) includes ten such essays, *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions* (2014)[8] has seven, and there are four in *Interpreting Exile* (2011).[9] Of these twenty-one essays by seventeen different scholars, six focus on the ways in which various biblical texts would have functioned to heal a social group,[10] and half of these argue or at least imply that these texts that provide

[8] E.-M. Becker, J. Dochhorn, and E. Kragelund Holt, eds., *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond* (SANt, 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

[9] B.E. Kelle, F.R. Ames, and J. Wright, eds., *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (SBLAIL, 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). Although the essay by Daniel Smith-Christopher in this collection does have the word "trauma" in its title, it focuses more on social psychological approaches in general than on reading biblical texts through the lens of one kind of trauma theory, and so I am not including it in my count of essays.

[10] In *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, see E. Boase, "Fragmented Voices: Collective Identity and Traumatization in Lamentations," pp. 49-66 (and for her emphasis on a sociological approach, see especially 49 and 53-56) and P. Browning Helsel, "Shared Pleasure to Soothe the Broken Spirit: Collective Trauma and Qoheleth," pp. 85-103 (especially 85-90); in *Trauma and Traumatization* see E.K. Holt, "Daughter Zion: Trauma, Collective Memory and Gender in OT Poetics," pp. 162-76 (166-69) and Boase, "The Traumatized Body: Communal Trauma and Somatization in Lamentations," pp. 193-209 (193-94); and in *Interpreting Exile*, see W. Morrow,

meaning for trauma would also have been therapeutic for trauma victims.[11] Another nine argue that particular biblical texts would have been therapeutic for readers suffering from trauma, and five of these claim that the texts' explanation of trauma would have contributed to victims' healing,[12] while the other four argue that writings such as Job or particular psalms provided textual models trauma sufferers could use to deal with their trauma.[13] The four in the very last

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"Deuteronomy 7 in Postcolonial Perspective: Cultural Fragmentation and Renewal," pp. 275-93 (287-88) and D.M. Carr, "Reading into the Gap: Refractions of Trauma in Israelite Prophecy," pp. 295-308 (302-305).

[11] Boase, "Fragmented Voices," p. 51 (a discussion of Judith Herman's work on recovery for individual victims); Morrow, "Deuteronomy 7," p. 289; and Carr, "Reading into the Gap," pp. 299-302.

[12] In *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, see M.S. Odell, "Fragments of Traumatic Memory: *Ṣalmê zākār* and Child Sacrifice in Ezekiel 16:15-22," pp. 107-24 (113-14) and L. Stulman, "Reflections on the Prose Sermons in the Book of Jeremiah: Duhm's and Mowinckel's Contributions to Contemporary Trauma," pp. 125-39 (132-35); in *Trauma and Traumatization*, see Stulman, "Reading the Bible through the Lens of Trauma and Art," pp. 177-92 (182-89) and O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute," pp. 213-17; and in *Interpreting Exile*, see J.L. Rumfelt, "Reversing Fortune: War, Pyschic Trauma, and the Promise of Narrative Repair," pp. 323-42 (325-29).

[13] In *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, see C.G. Frechette, "Daughter Babylon Raped and Bereaved (Isaiah 47): Symbolic Violence and Meaning-Making in Recovery from Trauma," pp. 67-83 (74) and B. Strawn, "Trauma, Psalmic Disclosure, and Authentic Happiness," pp. 143-60 (144-49, 154-55); and in *Trauma and Traumatization* see K. Nielsen, "Post-traumatic Stress

category are not quite arguing that the texts claim experience on the victims' behalf, although they do maintain that the texts could have guided victims' speech, thus directing it to conform to socially acceptable narratives.[14]

In this sample of recent essays, then, we see a fair amount of emphasis on analysis of texts as functioning to claim the experience of trauma for readers. There is certainly nothing wrong with examinations of the potentially beneficial social effects of biblical literature in response to massive trauma, and scholarship has done some important work in this regard; the central problem I am identifying arises when the field assumes that what is therapeutic for the group in this context will be equally so for traumatized individuals within it. An examination below of psychoanalytical and literary critical insights in regard to trauma will demonstrate that this is not so, and functions as a plea that we in the field take fuller account of these insights as we read biblical texts so that we and our readers rightly understand what kinds of therapeutic effects these texts did and did not have. One could argue that even investigations focused solely on the impact of biblical texts on the social group in the context of trauma should at least mention that these texts would have been anti-therapeutic for individual trauma victims within

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Disorder and the Book of Job," pp. 62-70 (68-69) and Frechette, "Destroying the Internalized Perpetrator: A Healing Function of the Violent Language against Enemies in the Psalms," pp. 71-84 (71-72).

[14] For a more positive view of the therapeutic efficacy of such texts, however, see G.O. West, "Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV," in E. Boase and C.G. Frechette (eds.), *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (SBLSemS, 86; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), pp. 209-30, which provides an example from a contemporary setting as to how this might work.

the community. Our failure to mention this potentially misleads readers who have little experience with trauma theory into assuming that textual explanations that may have led to social cohesion could also have been therapeutic for trauma victims. Indeed, our failure in this regard seems to tacitly assent to the silencing of trauma victims and ignore their need to use their own voices if they are to be involved in a therapeutic process in recovery from trauma.

The goal here is to deal with these problems created by our failure to fully consider the insights of the psychoanalytical and literary critical understanding of trauma, but we begin with the important work the field of Hebrew Bible has done in identifying the meanings that a variety of biblical writings have assigned to traumas that affected their readers. Once we have a broader sense of the ways in which biblical narratives can explain trauma and potentially act to shape social worldview and maintain group cohesion we can then examine why this social claiming of experience is anti-therapeutic for trauma victims. Scholarly analysis of these narrative explanations of trauma has tended to focus especially on writings that reflect the events associated with the exile, and so Christopher Frechette, for example, argues that the book of Jeremiah aims to create "group solidarity and identity" in response to the trauma of the destruction of Jerusalem.[15] Jeremiah may blame Judah for their suffering, but this is done within the context of making meaning that reforms group identity to deal with the trauma that had such a devastating effect on the social worldview.[16] Frechette is not the only scholar to read the book of Jeremiah as providing such meaning, one that includes blaming the victims; the understanding

[15] C.G. Frechette, "The Old Testament as Controlled Substance: How Insights from Trauma Studies Reveal Healing Capacities in Potentially Harmful Texts," *Int* 69 (2015), pp. 20-34 (28).

[16] Frechette, "The Old Testament as Controlled Substance," pp. 28-30.

here is that by explaining an event so horrific that it might seem to throw important social claims into radical question, the work helps restore to individuals a worldview that accords with the goal of reinforcing group cohesion.[17] It is not difficult to imagine that the horror the exiles survived through a sixteen-month siege of Jerusalem, the consequent mass slaughter and rape that assumedly accompanied the city's capture, and the forced migration to Babylon would have made survivors seriously doubt important aspects of the Judean worldview such as Yhwh's control of history. By explaining the trauma, the book imposes order over social chaos and uses this reconstruction of social worldview to point to a hopeful future,[18] although this does come with the cost of blaming the victims for the vast violence they have witnessed and for the suffering they have undergone.

It is easy enough to see how Judeans who managed to survive siege, conquest, destruction, and forced migration might have begun to doubt the claims made for Yhwh's power and the authority of the figures in the social hierarchy who made those claims; the creation or reformation of a believable worldview on the part of the social group makes complete sense in this context. As Alexander puts it, trauma in this sociological understanding is a construction created by a group that identifies a source of suffering—even, writes Alexander, if that suffering

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[17] E.g., K.M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), pp. 35-45, 93-102; Carr, "Reading into the Gap," p. 300; D.G. Garber, Jr., "A Vocabulary of Trauma in the Exilic Writings" in B.E. Kelle, F.R. Ames, and J. Wright (eds.), *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (SBLAIL, 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), pp. 309-22 (318-20); O'Connor, "How Trauma Studies Can Contribute," pp. 215-19; Stulman, "Reflections on the Prose Sermons."

[18] E.g., O'Connor, *Jeremiah*, pp. 103-13.

is based in an event that the community has invented—distributes responsibility for it, and establishes a victim, thus potentially reestablishing or strengthening social solidarity.[19] From this point of view, trauma is a social construction of meaning, what Alexander refers to as a "master narrative" that alters collective identity. Not all sociologists are as willing as Alexander to sever trauma from historical reality; for example, while Arthur Neal refers to "national trauma" as part of a social narrative, he also roots the concept in actual historical events, such as the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and the Cuban Missile Crisis.[20] Nations may eventually conceive of traumas such as these as heroic national accomplishments or as national failures,[21] and the social body might decide to commemorate them, glossing over their horrors in order to promote social goods.[22] Ron Eyerman also understands cultural trauma to be a social construction that can form the basis of social identity, albeit a construction negotiated in response to an actual "tear in the social fabric," such as slavery in the case of the African American community.[23] And Vamik Volkan, while a psychologist, adopts something like the sociological approach in his discussion of "chosen trauma," arguing that communities that have experienced massive trauma will share feelings, fantasies, and interpretations of the event and pass them on to following generations.

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[19] Alexander, *Trauma*, pp. 13-19.

[20] A.G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 4-5.

[21] Neal, *National Trauma*, pp. 203-204.

[22] Neal, *National Trauma*, pp. 207-11.

[23] R. Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge Cultural Social Studies; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1-10.

But even shared feelings of powerlessness, Volkan argues, can help bind a community together, and groups can choose to reawaken these and other feelings associated with the trauma—can deliberately claim this experience, in other words—even generations after the event, in order to portray a current enemy as responsible for its past trauma.[24]

When traumas have affected an entire society and shaken the group to its core, it makes sense that the community would act to negotiate and construct a meaning for such an event, one that reformulates social identity to take account of it and stop the group from falling apart, and this has been an important focus of biblical scholarship as it uses the sociological understanding of trauma to analyze writings that respond to the exile. In the applications of trauma theory to Ezekiel, biblical scholarship has arrived at conclusions that sound much like those produced in its readings of Jeremiah; Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, blames the people for their suffering in order to reform a shattered worldview, a reformation that maintains Yhwh controls history and that suffering is not random but deserved,[25] and like Jeremiah it points readers to a hopeful future.[26]

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[24] V. Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), pp. 36-49. The sociologist Kai Erikson, however, argues that communal bonds are almost always weakened rather than strengthened following widespread exposure to trauma within the community; see K. Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 183-99.

[25] E.g., G. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Women as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 121-22; D.G. Garber, Jr., "Traumatizing Ezekiel, the Exilic Prophet," in J.H. Ellens and W.G. Rollins (eds.), *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 215-35 (226-27); B.E.

For William Morrow, Second Isaiah seems to be creating meaning to help exiles "reframe" their social worldview and their senses of self by locating meaning for the trauma they suffered.[27] Elizabeth Boase reads Lamentations as an attempt to create unity within a community fragmented by trauma, in part by distributing blame for it,[28] although others argue the book deemphasizes explanations and the apportioning of blame.[29] The Deuteronomistic History

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Kelle, "Dealing with the Trauma of Defeat: The Rhetoric of the Devastation and Rejuvenation of Nature in Ezekiel," *JBL* 128 (2009), pp. 469-90; N.R. Bowen, *Ezekiel* (AOTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), pp. 91-93; Garber, "A Vocabulary of Trauma," pp. 318-20; R. Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch als Trauma-Literatur* (VTSup, 154; Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 642-44 (but see as well the nuanced discussions of guilt in Ezekiel 16 on pp. 371-409 and in Ezek 21:1-12 on pp. 414-17); D.M. Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 76-77.

[26] E.g., Bowen, *Ezekiel*, pp. 209-10.

[27] W. Morrow, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Vicarious Atonement in the Second Isaiah" in J.H. Ellens and W.G. Rollins (eds.), *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 167-83; for the language of reframing of self and worldview, see 171.

[28] Boase, "Fragmented Voices."

[29] E.g., T. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 43-44, 53-54; K.M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 84-87, 99-108; Holt, "Daughter Zion," pp. 171-74. Compare this with Boase, "Fragmented Voices," pp. 60-62.

clearly seems to provide explanation for its exilic readers' trauma by blaming them and their ancestors for their suffering (although readers might also locate deconstructions of this explanation as the narrative is thrown into question at many points),[30] and Morrow argues that the narrative of Deuteronomy 7 reacts to the trauma of exile by strengthening the boundaries of self and community.[31]

Analysis of Hebrew Bible texts through the lens of trauma theory has not been limited to writings that seem to reflect the baleful light of the destruction of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon: Qoheleth, for example, has been portrayed as working to restore social bonds disrupted through the collective trauma of Persian-period colonialism;[32] psalms have been described as revivifying trauma survivors' sense of self;[33] and Hosea has been read as responding to trauma caused by Neo-Assyrian invasions in the eighth century BCE by blaming the people for their failure to remain loyal to their God.[34] All of this work is potentially quite helpful in illuminating the social functions of such writings within ancient Judah and Israel. Earlier in the article,

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[30] So, at least, according to the analysis in D. Janzen, *The Violent Gift: Trauma's Subversion of the Deuteronomistic History's Narrative* (LHBOTS, 561; New York: T & T Clark International, 2012). Louis Stulman points to a similar phenomenon within the prophetic books, where the certainties of their explanations of trauma are undermined within the books themselves ("Reading the Bible," pp. 186-87).

[31] Morrow, "Deuteronomy 7," especially pp. 281-83.

[32] Browning Helsel, "Shared Pleasure."

[33] Frechette, "Destroying the Internalized Perpetrator" and Strawn, "Trauma, Psalmic Disclosure, and Authentic Happiness."

[34] Carr, *Holy Resilience,* pp. 24-40.

however, we documented a not-uncommon tendency in the field to assume that a claiming of the experience of trauma can benefit individual victims as well as the group as a whole. Individual worldviews are, of course, formed by the societies of which they are a part, but that is precisely what is at stake here: the narratives created by societies to explain trauma promote social goods and aim to form the identities of the individuals within the society in particular ways, but these narratives will only be successful insofar as they are widely accepted, and in groups replete with individual sufferers of trauma this will demand that victims repress their speech about the non-experience and meaninglessness of trauma, speech that is necessary in a therapeutic process. The very kinds of narrative explanations that we just surveyed, the explanations that potentially helped to reform communal identity for ancient groups exposed to horrific violence, will not be therapeutic for individual trauma victims, who encounter trauma as a sort of anti-narrative, but to explain fully why this is so we will need to examine trauma as it is understood within literary criticism and psychoanalysis, the matter to which we now turn.

Unclaimed experience: literary and psychoanalytical approaches to trauma

Since the understanding of trauma within literary criticism emerged out of the way psychoanalysis understands it, we begin with Freud's observations about trauma in works produced in the wake of World War I. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, published in 1920, Freud argues that the root of trauma lies in subjects being unprepared for a massive and horrific fright (*Schreck*). Dreams of trauma victims are very literal repetitions of the traumatic event, demonstrating "that the traumatic experience is constantly forcing itself upon the patient," leaving him or her "fixated" to the trauma. These traumatic dreams that repetitively return the subject to the very unpleasurable event that caused the trauma are quite unlike normal ones,

which are governed by the pleasure principle.[35] Organisms normally shield themselves from unpleasant stimuli, writes Freud, but trauma breaks through this shield of the pleasure principle if subjects are not emotionally prepared for violence at such horrific levels, and as a result it is not possible for the self to master the trauma.[36] This failure of experience results in victims who are subjected to trauma's involuntary repetitions in very literal dreams, a sign, Freud argues, that they are unconsciously attempting to create retroactively the prophylactic anxiety that would have prepared them for the event and protected them.[37] As a result, trauma victims do not normally remember their trauma, which is what their therapists would like them to do, but repeat it.[38] Without real memory or experience of it, of course, the trauma is not known to the victim in the normal sense of the term. And because trauma has not been fully experienced, it is not clear to survivors whether or not their trauma is truly part of the self, an issue Freud discusses in an introduction to a collection of essays on the "war neuroses" published in 1919, where he describes the traumatic neuroses he observed in soldiers as producing a split or conflict in the ego.[39] He gets at this point again in his study of the uncanny, also published in 1919. The

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[35] S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (trans. J. Strachey; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966-1974), vol. 18, pp. 7-64 (12-14).

[36] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 18-25.

[37] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 25-27.

[38] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 12-17.

[39] S. Freud, "Introduction to *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (trans. J. Strachey; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966-1974), vol. 17, pp. 207-10.

uncanny (*Unheimlich*), writes Freud, stands against the ego and is dissociated from it. This double of the ego has been created by the ego's defense mechanism as it projected out from itself material it found threatening, such as the overwhelming horror individuals encounter in traumatic events. The uncanny repeats involuntarily, seems inescapable, and the individual is helpless to control it, precisely the helplessness experienced in some dream states, and so it can seem as if the self is haunted.[40] This description of the uncanny seems like the trauma he discusses in his introductory essay on the war neuroses, in which he refers to the traumatic ego as being a "parasitic double" of the ego and in conflict with it,[41] the result of the original failure of experience.

Much more recent biomedical studies of trauma have provided support for Freud's observations. In a discussion of the neurobiology of trauma, the psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk writes that in normal situations of danger the amygdala signals the hypothalamus and brain stem to release stress hormones that aid one's ability to fight or flee, but that in cases of overwhelming

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[40] S. Freud, "The Uncanny" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (trans. J. Strachey; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966-1974), vol. 17, pp. 219-52.

[41] See also the reading of Freud's work in regard to trauma in C. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 58-62. In the terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, trauma is the real, the chaos that is not conscious experience but that exists beyond the signifier and that can be inferred only through symptoms; see G.H. Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 26 (1995), pp. 537-63 (539) and J. Flanagan, "The Seduction of History: Trauma, Re-Memory, and the Ethics of the Real," *CLIO* 31 (2002), pp. 387-402 (389).

horror the dorsal vagal complex, part of the parasympathetic nervous system, can be activated, shutting down awareness.[42] Trauma victims are thus unable to truly experience or react to the situations of great violence in which they find themselves, reflecting Freud's observation that victims have been overwhelmed by horrific events. Sensory information goes to the thalamus, which passes it on to the amygdala and frontal lobes, but this processing of information can break down, and for trauma victims it will be encoded as dissociated fragments, traces of sensations, images, and sounds, something that is very different than normal memory, and unlike normal memories, traumatic ones do not change over time,[43] which explains why Freud encountered victims whose trauma repeated in very literal dreams of the event. Traumatic "memories" have not been stored as normal memories are, and they do not become part of victims' sense of self, of the autobiographical story that they tell themselves to make sense of who they are,[44] echoing Freud's conclusion that trauma is a parasitic double that has not been assimilated into the ego. Normal memories that do form part of one's sense of self change over time in order to fit in to an ever-changing self-understanding, but traumatic ones do not because they have not been assimilated into the self, and so they are relived rather than remembered. This dissociation of trauma from the victim's sense of self, writes van der Kolk, "is the essence of trauma. The overwhelming experience is split off and fragmented, so that the emotions, sounds, images, thoughts, and physical sensations take on a life of their own. The sensory fragments of

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[42] B.A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), pp. 60-62, 80-84.

[43] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, pp. 175-76.

[44] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, pp. 180-81.

memory intrude into the present, where they are literally relived."[45] This failure to experience, remember, or integrate trauma into the self means that there is no distinction between past and present during traumatic flashbacks, in which the trauma repeats in victims' lives as if no time had passed,[46] which again reflects Freud's observations of sufferers' repetitive and very literal—or uncanny—dreams of the event. The trauma appears to be neither a part of one's experiences nor of one's self, and traumatic "memories" are simply fragmented sensations that trauma sufferers cannot really make any sense of.[47]

So when, in discussions of the literary critical and psychoanalytical approaches to trauma, we refer to trauma as unclaimed experience, we mean precisely that: the event was not experienced in the normal sense of the term, and so it is not remembered in the normal sense of the term, and thus cannot really be claimed as an experience by victims because it is not integrated into their sense of self in the way normal experiences are, and so survivors encounter trauma as an anti-narrative. As Henry Greenspan puts it, a victim's narrative about trauma is an artificial creation, the production of a story for what is a "not-story." He refers to conversations with one Holocaust survivor who tells him that his Holocaust testimony "is *not* a story. It has to be *made* a story. And with all the frustration that implies."[48] Moreover, trauma resists narrative

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[45] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, p. 66. For a very similar explanation of the dissociation of trauma, see P.T. Stien and J.C. Kendall, *Psychological Trauma and the Developing Brain: Neurologically Based Interventions for Troubled Children* (New York: The Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press, 2004), pp. 81-96.

[46] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, pp. 66-69.

[47] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, pp. 192-94.

[48] H. Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony* (St. Paul, MN:

because victims have great difficulty in speaking of it. In part this is because, when victims relive trauma, the left hemisphere of the brain, which organizes thought into logical sequences and translates perceptions into words, becomes far less active, and the sensations that make up traumatic "memories" cannot be verbally expressed.[49] It thus becomes extremely difficult for survivors to articulate traumatic events at all, as this exchange between an interviewer and Abraham Bomba, who cut the hair of women at Auschwitz immediately before they were to be gassed, demonstrates:

> Interviewer: Go on, Abe. You must go on. You have to.
>
> Bomba: I can't. It's too horrible. Please.
>
> Interviewer: We have to do it. You know it.
>
> Bomba: I won't be able to do it.
>
> Interviewer: You have to do it. I know it's very hard. I know and I apologize.
>
> Bomba: Don't make me go on please.
>
> Interviewer: Please. We must go on.[50]

And even apart from this neurobiological explanation for trauma's speechlessness, language itself reaches its limits and fails in the face of trauma. Jean Améry, who survived Auschwitz and torture by the SS, puts it this way:

> It would be totally senseless to try to describe here the pain that was inflicted on me. Was it "like a red-hot iron in my shoulders," and was another "like a dull wooden stake that

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Paragon House, 2nd ed., 2010), pp. 2-4. Quotes from pp. 3 and 4; italics in the original.

[49] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, pp. 44-45, 175-76.

[50] From C. Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), pp. 107-108.

> had been driven into the back of my head"? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of language to communicate.[51]

Primo Levi makes the same point when he writes that words like "hunger," "fear," and "pain" mean something entirely different to Holocaust survivors than they do to people who have not experienced such trauma.[52] This, says Elie Wiesel, is why it is impossible to write about the Holocaust: "We all knew that we could never, never say what had to be said, that we could never express in words, coherent, intelligible words, our experience of madness on an absolute scale…. All words seemed inadequate…."[53] It is not a metaphor to refer to trauma as unspeakable,[54] and

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[51] J. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities* (trans. S. Rosenfeld and S.P. Rosenfeld; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 33.

[52] Primo Levi, *If This is a Man/The Truce* (trans. S. Woolf; London: Vintage, 1996), p. 129.

[53] E. Wiesel, "Why I Write," in A.H. Rosenfeld and I. Greenberg (eds.), *Confronting the Holocaust: The Impact of Elie Wiesel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 200-206 (201).

[54] Contra, e.g., B. Lang, *Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 17-18 and B. Stampfl, "Parsing the Unspeakable in the Context of Trauma," in M. Balaev (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 15-41 (21-22).

thus as something that refuses narrative, this is literally true.

Although victims do not truly know their trauma—it is "as close to nescience as to knowledge," as Geoffrey Hartman puts it[55]—trauma is constantly present in its dissociative repetition as sufferers are forced to relive it without understanding it. And because victims are reliving rather than remembering, trauma constantly freezes time, converting the present into the traumatic past. "I'm not alive," writes Charlotte Delbo in her Holocaust trilogy. "I'm imprisoned in memories and repetitions."[56] She points to the dissociation of trauma and its repetition, trapping her within a traumatic past that is constantly present, a past that cannot be known or believed and yet that can seem more real than her post-Auschwitz existence. "I'm not alive," she writes again. "I died in Auschwitz and no one knows it."[57] Traumatic repetition colonizes the victim's present, converts it into the traumatic past so that the past trauma alone is real and replaces the present. As Caruth writes, trauma "literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood."[58] Or, as Michael Rothberg puts it in a discussion of Delbo's work, "the past is at once completely present, because trauma stops time, and

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[55] Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge," p. 537.

[56] C. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (trans. R.C. Lamont; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 261.

[57] Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, p. 267.

[58] C. Caruth, "Introduction," in C. Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 151-57 (153; italics in the original).

completely distant, because such time is not susceptible to transformation."[59]

Trauma, then, is antithetical to narrative, not simply because survivors do not know and are unable to articulate it, but because it freezes the chronology that narrative needs in order to proceed. Unlike the normal memories that form part of the autobiographical sense of self and thus change as the sense of self does, traumatic "memories," because they have not been assimilated by the self and remain unknown, return in literal repetitions of the past and thus freeze time. Trauma time, as Jenny Edkins calls it, is thus very different than the chronological time of narrative.[60] Narratives relate events that characters experience and in which they participate in some kind of recognizable chronological framework, but trauma offers neither experience nor chronology. Narrative creates order out of chaos as it places different events at different points in time and integrates them into a single story, but this is simply not possible with trauma.[61] Stories need beginnings and endings, but trauma cannot provide these, because it is the same time repeated over and over.[62] All that can be grasped about trauma is an absence of

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[59] M. Rothberg, "Between the Extreme and the Everyday: Ruth Klüger's Traumatic Realism" in N.K. Miller and J. Tougaw (eds.), *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 55-70 (65).

[60] J. Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 29-42.

[61] Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, pp. 84-89.

[62] See E. van Alphen, "Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma," in M. Bal, J. Crewe, and L. Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 24-38 (34-35) and R. Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 64-67.

encounter, knowledge, and meaning.[63] Trauma provides no meaning because it is not known and cannot be believed, and so one cannot draw conclusions or lessons from it. The impossibility of knowledge and time in the context of trauma results in a "crisis of truth," as Caruth puts it;[64] when there is no knowledge of trauma, even by its victims, then it is difficult to refer to its truth, and so as her epigraph for *None of Us Will Return*, the first volume of her trilogy, Delbo writes, "Today, I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain it is truthful."[65]

Assimilation of trauma and fetishistic narrative

There is thus a clear difference in the sociological and psychoanalytical/literary critical approaches to trauma: in the standard view of sociologists, trauma is narrative created by the group that produces meaning and explanation and that can work toward social solidarity, while from the literary and psychoanalytical understanding, trauma lacks chronology, beginnings, endings, experience, knowledge, and meaning, and so is anti-narrative. But if traumatic events have affected an entire community and shaken belief in the validity of the group's worldview, then the group will have a very real need to reinforce social cohesion by providing a narrative that can make sense of the trauma in a way that reinforces or reformulates important aspects of the social worldview. If these narratives are actually effective then they will silence and overwrite the trauma of individual victims, which has no place for narrative or meaning. The social narrative needs widespread acceptance of its meaning if it is to result in social cohesion,

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[63] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, pp. 18, 61-62.

[64] C. Caruth, "Introduction" in C. Cruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 3-12 (8).

[65] Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, p. 1.

but this will not be possible if many trauma victims speak of the "nescience" and meaninglessness of trauma; the social narrative will not succeed, in short, unless individual victims repress their trauma. The social narrative may even blame the victims for the horrors they suffered, an approach taken by biblical literature, as numerous exegetes have pointed out. Converting trauma into a narrative of a well-known national myth, a story of struggle or heroic endurance, or something else that converts non-meaning into meaning can turn trauma into a familiar and even comforting story,[66] and some Holocaust histories do precisely this.[67] From an ancient Judean and Israelite standpoint, blaming the victims is itself a comforting narrative strategy as it reasserts Yhwh's control of history and thus validates things built on divine legitimacy, such as cultic and leadership institutions.

These explanatory narratives, however, would not have been therapeutic for individuals even if they did result in increased social solidarity, for if trauma victims are to experience a therapeutic assimilation of trauma into the self then they must formulate their own speech about it.[68] Only in this way will trauma cease to be the unassimilated "parasitic double" of the self that

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[66] E.L. Santner, "History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma," in S. Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 143-54 (149-51); Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*, pp. 115-16, 134.

[67] See T. Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust* (Issues in Historiography; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 290-93. Lawson, for example, discusses criticisms of Martin Gilbert's *The Holocaust* that critique its imposition of narrative coherence over survivor testimony and its argument that survival was itself a triumph of the human spirit (276-78).

[68] While some readings of trauma within literary criticism can be read as assuming that

haunts it and begin to seem like a true experience and memory. Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst who works with trauma survivors and who is a founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, writes that survivors will not be able to truly know and assimilate the trauma without speaking their testimony to empathetic listeners who are willing to receive it, and the listener, he writes, will become a "co-owner of the traumatic event."[69] For trauma to be known by victims it must be told by the victim and believed by victim and listener; while victims had to endure their trauma passively, in this process they can choose to create narratives and so become the subjects of their own speech.[70] But there are many reasons why it is a difficult road to survivors' creation of a story out of a "not-story," not least because of the failure of experience, knowledge, and chronology in the context of trauma. And because victims do not truly know trauma, because it does not appear to be part of the self, it is not something they can actually believe—this is why Delbo can say she is not sure that what she writes about

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recovery is not possible for victims and that they will never be able to know their trauma, therapists who specialize in working with trauma victims move toward integration of the trauma with the self. See Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, pp. 82-83.

[69] D. Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in S. Felman and D. Laub (eds.), *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 57-74 (57). See also N.C. Auerhahn and D. Laub, "Intergenerational Memory of the Holocaust," in Y. Danieli (ed.), *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), pp. 21-41 (22).

[70] S.J. Brison, "Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self," in M. Bal, J. Crewe, and L. Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 39-54 (39-40, 46-47).

her trauma is true—and to come to believe it they must have a listener who is willing to suspend disbelief,[71] although, given the horrors of such testimony, listeners often find this difficult. They can experience a range of defensive feelings, such as a sense of numbness, anger unwittingly directed at the speaker, an obsession with fact-finding that circumvents the victim's speech, or hyperemotionality, and all of these will impede the testimony.[72] But without the empathetic witness who allows the victim's speech to proceed, it becomes impossible for sufferers to think that anybody could communicate what happened and what is happening to them, or that anyone could believe it,[73] and trauma then remains in the realm of the unbelievable, the unnarratable, and the unassimilatable.

Listening is so difficult that it is much easier to overwrite testimony with comforting narratives, and this is as true for the society as a whole as it is for individual listeners. At the center of trauma is its overwhelming nature that makes it impossible for victims to experience or react to it; for the group, testimony to trauma that is based in the inability to act threatens the social belief that individuals should choose to act ethically, to act in ways that the society deems to be good and that benefits the community, in other words, and so it is easier for the group to construct narratives in which the sufferers are guilty for their choice to act in particular ways or to construct other narratives of social goods over trauma. It is sometimes easier, in fact, for victims to accept these narratives than to face the absence of knowledge and meaning with which

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[71] See Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge," pp. 541-42.

[72] Laub, "Bearing Witness," pp. 72-73.

[73] D. Laub, "An Event without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival" in S. Felman and D. Laub (eds.), *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 75-92 (80-82).

trauma has left them. Lawrence Langer in particular has argued that the need to erase trauma in the language of heroism and martyrdom, explanations of trauma using the language of social goods, flies in the face of trauma testimonies.[74] In an event in which victims are utterly overwhelmed, there is no ethical choice at all, and questions of morality are moot; testimonies demonstrate that trauma victims do not really know if they are subjects or simply objects of the events in which they were involved.[75] Langer refers, for example, to a Holocaust survivor who, upon arrival at Auschwitz, was sent to the right with his younger brother while his parents were sent to the left to die. Not knowing what this separation meant, he sent his brother after his parents. "I feel like I killed him," he said in his testimony, accepting blame for an act in which he bore no responsibility, demonstrating the futility of relying on an ethical system in order to make sense of the event.[76] In a discussion of the actions of a Jewish doctor who poisoned the children in a hospital in the Warsaw ghetto before the Nazis could remove them to Treblinka, Langer argues that this is not a story of heroism, which is how one surviving leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising described it, but one that points to "the poverty of traditional moral vocabulary when we address the subject of human conduct during the destruction of European Jewry."[77]

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[74] E.g., L.L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 162-205; L.L. Langer, "Beyond Theodicy: Jewish Victims and the Holocaust," in *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 25-30.

[75] Van Alphen, "Symptoms of Discursivity," pp. 28-29.

[76] Langer, "Beyond Theodicy," pp. 29-30.

[77] L.L. Langer, "A Tainted Legacy: Remembering the Warsaw Ghetto," in *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 31-40 (32).

But explanatory narratives like the ones Langer rejects provide comfort because they restore familiar stories and morals to listeners, including to the victims themselves. Accepting explanatory narratives relieves them of having to deliberately speak of the trauma that they themselves find difficult to believe, and these narratives can have the benefit of reforming or reinforcing important social mores that bolster social solidarity. They are not, however, narratives that will allow trauma survivors to provide testimony to empathetic listeners, but ones that implicitly call upon victims to repress the overwhelming non-experience of trauma and accept stories of social goods or narratives of ethical failures that point to the necessity of those goods. Dominick LaCapra describes such stories as totalizing narratives, ones that attempt to explain everything and in which mourning is always overcome. This, he writes, is very much like the fetishistic narrative that marginalizes trauma and presents historians' values as realized in the past events they narrate.[78] If trauma goes "beyond the pleasure principle," fetishistic narrative restores pleasure insofar as it avoids and disavows trauma.[79] This is a fair description of much of the biblical literature that has been discussed in scholarly readings of trauma: this literature is often totalizing, presenting everything readers need to know to explain the trauma; it can point toward a hopeful future when mourning will be overcome; and it presents the writers' values as manifested through God's work in history. And in constructing the narratives that do this and that draw lessons to be learned from traumatic events, the group marginalizes or represses the trauma that victims have suffered; the narrative will not create social solidarity if a community full of trauma victims refuses to accept its meaning. Nothing is more important in recovery from

[78] Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 190-93.

[79] Santner, "History beyond the Pleasure Principle."

trauma than social support, writes van der Kolk, but this involves "*reciprocity*: being truly heard and seen by the people around us,"[80] something that is very different than having one's voice drowned out by a group that explains what victims are to think about their trauma and what lessons they are to learn from it. Therapy for trauma victims is possible only when listeners are willing to hear and believe the "not-story," but when a community fails to listen and instead insists on a story that promotes a particular worldview and set of social goods, the not-stories become unacceptable. This process is not therapeutic for trauma victims, since their trauma is not known, and so there are no morals to be drawn from it, no wisdom to be gained from this anti-knowledge; fetishistic narrative does not actually explain the trauma that repetitively intrudes into victims' lives, it simply overwrites it to promote the social interest. It has been a general failure on the part of biblical scholarship to recognize this that has sometimes led us to make therapeutic claims for the biblical literature that the writings do not have.

Conclusion: The ethical claim of the *Muselmann*

Ancient societies obviously did not use the insights of modern psychotherapy when dealing with trauma victims. It is certainly not impossible that some trauma survivors in ancient Judah found empathetic listeners who acted as witnesses to their testimony and so allowed them to know and integrate their trauma; Lamentations, at least, suggests that something like this could have happened.[81] However, it is not even clear that the speech and consequent assimilation of trauma envisioned by psychotherapy for trauma victims would always have been desirable in ancient

[80] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, p. 79; italics in the original.

[81] See Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, pp. 4, 43-44, 53-54 and O'Connor, *Lamentations*, pp. 94-95, 99-108.

contexts. Much, if not all, of the biblical literature we discussed in the introduction was produced in the context of colonialism, a setting in which we would expect everyday existence to result in trauma;[82] in such a situation victims' silence concerning their trauma might well have been more adaptive as a coping mechanism in lives that would continue to be traumatic than the kind of speech psychotherapy sees as necessary for integration of trauma into the self.[83] Accepting a

[82] E.g., D. Lloyd, "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?," *Interventions* 2 (2000), pp. 212-28; Amy Novak, "Who Speaks? Who Listens? The Problem of Address in Two Nigerian Trauma Novels," *Studies in the Novel* 40 (2008), pp. 31-51, especially 37; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in an Age of Decolonization* (Cultural Memory in the Present; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 87-96; K.I. Baxter, "Memory and Photography: Rethinking Postcolonial Trauma Studies," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47 (2011), pp. 18-29 (18-19); G. Forter, "Colonial Trauma, Utopian Carnality, Modernist Form: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," in M. Balaev (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 70-105.

[83] Stef Craps, for example, makes precisely this point in a discussion of Aminatta Forna's novel *The Memory of Love*, set in Sierra Leone in the aftermath of an eleven-year civil war ("Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age" in G. Beulens, S. Durrant, and R. Eaglestone [eds.], *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* [London: Routledge, 2014], pp. 45-61 [51-57]), as does Ana Miller in her discussion of Achmat Dangor's novel *Bitter Fruit*, set in South Africa during the apartheid and post-apartheid periods ("The Past in the Present: Personal and Collective Trauma in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*," *Studies in the Novel* 40 [2008], pp. 146-60).

narrative that blamed them for their pain might have been all ancient Judean or Israelite trauma victims were able to psychologically afford, but we should not confuse that acceptance with therapy.

And yet, even if that was the case, this does not alleviate the responsibility contemporary scholars have to fully take into account the understanding of trauma in literary criticism and psychoanalysis and to point out in their readings of trauma in biblical texts—even when these readings are focused only on potential social benefits of the texts—that fetishistic narratives that provide meaning and explanation for trauma overwrite the victims' trauma and claim the survivors' unclaimed experience. This is important lest our readers believe that what is beneficial for societies in regard to healing from trauma will necessarily also be therapeutic for individual victims, which can seem like the most natural of assumptions; it is especially important if pastoral counselors are looking at the ways in which we analyze biblical texts that reflect traumatic events. And it is also important if biblical scholars feel as if they have an ethical obligation to the voiceless traumatized. In *If This is a Man*, Levi discusses the difference between "the drowned and the saved," where the drowned are those who in Auschwitz were called the *Muselmänner*, those without the emotional or physical resources to survive more than a few months. These were "the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence…. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death…."[84] But for Levi, these were the "complete witnesses," and he can only speak in their place, even if bearing witness for them is an impossibility.[85] Their humanity itself was called into question—from the Nazis' perspective, this

[84] Levi, *If This is a Man*, pp. 93-96, quote on 96.

[85] See Levi, *If This is a Man*, p. 198 and G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The*

was their whole point[86]—but, as Giorgio Agamben notes, to deny them their humanity is to repeat what the Nazis did.[87] We should perhaps feel wary of saying nothing when biblical literature denies the traumatized a voice, of feeling free to ignore ancient trauma victims and to turn our attention only to the narratives that would silence them. We cannot create trauma testimony that died with the victims or that was erased in the texts that are available to us; it is as impossible for us to bear witness for these ancient victims of trauma as it was for Levi to bear witness for those of the twentieth century. But we send a problematic signal to readers, particularly those who might be involved in trauma therapy in some way, when we fail to be explicit about the overwriting of victims' trauma in biblical literature, for then we appear to be siding with those who would silence the voice of trauma sufferers and we appear to be ignoring the therapeutic need of victims to use their own speech. If biblical scholars will not listen for the voice of the traumatized in these texts, or at least emphasize its erasure, then even the traces of these voices are lost forever, and a problematic message is sent concerning the therapeutic value of the literature.

Witness and the Archive (trans. D. Heller-Roazen; New York: Zone Books, 2002), pp. 33-34.

[86] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, pp. 84-85.

[87] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, pp. 63-64.